



Robert.N.Schock@fakeaddress.net on 10/12/2001 12:07:48 PM

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A major roadblock to easing the energy predicament of the US (and the globe) is the inability of nuclear energy providers to deal convincingly with the waste from the 20% of U.S. power plants that now burn nuclear fuel. This must be done safely and without harm to the environment. The main stumbling block here is the U.S. government's inability to make progress on the site it has chosen for a potential repository for the waste at Yucca Mt.

There are a number of reasons for this obstruction. But foremost is that most Nevadans are dead set against the idea of putting the waste from the hundred or so nuclear power plants across the U.S. in their state. That there are no nuclear power plants in Nevada exacerbates the situation. Their resistance is not basically technical, even though they can and will go to great lengths to tie the federal government into technical knots. Fundamentally their resistance is psychological. Who wants everyone else's garbage in their backyard?

Let's look at where the waste comes from. There are currently 9 nuclear power plants in Pennsylvania and Illinois, 7 in Alabama and South Carolina, 6 in New York, 5 each in Florida and North Carolina, and 4 each in Michigan, Georgia, Virginia and Texas. Even though the federal government and industry wishes to store only 60% of the waste generated by all U.S. plants from their inception to 2011, the citizens of Nevada assume that, once one repository is operating in their state, more will follow. Congressional representatives from the nuclear power states feed this impression by reminding Nevada representatives that they are outnumbered and therefore outvoted. If the federal government chooses to go forward with a repository in Nevada, then the State legislatures and the governor can file a notice of disapproval that can be overturned with the votes of both houses of the federal government. If this were to happen, court action and more delays would certainly follow.

To free up this situation other states or regions must begin to accept some responsibility for the waste generated from their own nuclear power and to work with the federal government to find solutions. These solutions must contain some degree of equity. Those that benefit from the power must initiate and contribute to the solution. The federal government can provide support and know-how, but no one is ever going to willingly accept an indefinite amount of someone else's garbage.

There is a solution. The federal government in the past worked on an option to bury such wastes very deep in the ground. Much deeper than Yucca Mt. And deep enough to have excellent assurance that there will never be interaction with the biosphere. The technology to drill holes up to 12 feet in diameter and 10,000 feet deep was developed over 40 years ago and has been demonstrated numerous times in burying nuclear weapons for testing purposes. Similar holes placed in the states or regions where the waste is being generated would immediately decrease the size of needed repositories. Instead of the entire country's waste, a state or region would deal only with the waste it generates for its own purposes. People in those states or regions would now have to consider the entire fuel cycle in their decisions about using nuclear power.

Not only would the options for disposal be increased but, most importantly, Nevadans would then likely accept one repository at Yucca Mt. with the assurance that they would not have to accept everyone's waste for the indefinite future.

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